

Permanent Revolution in the U.S. Today

**Speeches by Freedom Socialist Party delegates to
the**

**Trotskyist and Revolutionary Socialist
Conference,**

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction

I. The American Revolution and Trotskyism

by Robert Crisman, Seattle, Washington, November 1985

II. What Went Wrong with the Socialist Workers Party?

by Stephen Durham, New York, New York, November 1985

III. Women's Emancipation and Permanent Revolution

by Monica Hill, Los Angeles, California, November 1985

IV. Lesbian and Gay Liberation: A Trotskyist Analysis

By Merle Woo, San Francisco, California, November 1985

INTRODUCTION

The four talks in this document were originally presented at the Trotskyist and Revolutionary Socialist Conference, held in San Francisco in 1985 over the Thanksgiving weekend.

This was the first of several conferences called to discuss the possibilities for U.S. Trotskyist regroupment in the wake of the abandonment of Permanent Revolution and Trotskyism by the Socialist Workers Party (SWP) in 1983. Hosted by the Workers Socialist League, attendees included International Socialist League (FI), Spark, Bolshevik Tendency, Revolutionary Socialist League, and representatives of the Committee for a Revolutionary Socialist Party (CRSP) and the Freedom Socialist Party (FSP). CRSP was founded in 1977 by the FSP and others as a Trotskyist regroupment alternative to the degenerate SWP.

A second conference was held in San Francisco in December 1986 and a third is slated to be held in April 1988, also in San Francisco.

Programmatic regroupment of the U.S. and world Trotskyist movement is a crying necessity today, given the slide into Stalinism by the SWP and the revisionist effacement of Trotskyism by the United Secretariat of the Fourth International. CRSP and FSP welcomed the 1985 conference as an opportunity to initiate programmatic discussion of key revolutionary issues that are the necessary starting point for regroupment.

Among the topics up for discussion at the conference were the reasons for the degeneration of the SWP; the coming American Revolution and the role of Trotskyists within it; the centrality of feminism and lesbian/gay liberation in our time.

These subjects are integrally related. Likewise, an organization's position with regard to any one of them will reflect its approach to the others.

In their presentations and intervention in discussion, CRSP/FSP comrades argued forcefully that the U.S., because of its economic and military weight, was central to world revolution, and that Trotskyists must become Bolshevik leaders of U.S. socialist upheaval. They traced the degeneration of the SWP to its refusal to come to grips with the American question, i.e., to recognize race and sex as the key class issues of our era. They then pinpointed the significance of race and sex to revolution, and the leading role that people of color, women, and lesbians and gays will play in the coming showdown with capitalism.

All other tendencies at the conference downplayed the primary importance of the American Revolution. In keeping with this, they

ascribed the SWP's fall not to its denial of the American question, but to the "bureaucratism," "lack of theory," and sundry "mistakes" of SWP founder James P. Cannon. No doubt their anti-Cannonism stems from the fact that it was he who first insisted on the central importance of U.S. revolt in his **Theses on the American Revolution** in 1946.

The anti-Cannonites accordingly pooh-poohed the importance of feminism and the leadership of the most oppressed to socialism. Echoing the SWP, they extolled the revolutionary virtues of straight white male workers in heavy industry, the element that composes the U.S. labor aristocracy.

This laborite fixation is dangerous: unchecked it will kill all faith in workers' revolutionary potential, undermine belief in Marxist theory, and squelch the desire to build U.S. Bolshevism.

Disagreements over the nature, significance, and perspectives of the American Revolution necessarily lead to disparity over basic program and strategy. Yet Bolshevik unity--the avowed goal of the conference--is by definition programmatic. For this reason CRSP/FSP comrades maintained that meaningful regroupment could only be reached through discussion and resolution of the fundamental differences represented at the conference.

Other tendencies argued for regroupment on the basis of united actions on issues such as opposition to the U. S. war drive and through work in mass movement coalitions. The rationale was that such work would, of itself, lead to unity and closer political perspectives.

CRSP and FSP are not opposed to coalition work with Trotskyists--or with other leftists with whom we have far greater differences. We have worked in and built many such coalitions in the past 20 years. But coalition work is by nature limited and transient. Every issue sooner or later poses alternative courses of action. Tactical, strategic and programmatic questions inevitably arise and must be resolved if the coalition is to survive.

How much truer this is with regard to regroupment! In fact, united action without simultaneous discussion of program means the effective burial of regroupment, and the subsuming of Trotskyism in politically polyglot coalitions.

No agreement was reached on an approach to regroupment at the 1985 conference. Yet because the conference was open and thoroughly democratic, it provided for a rich exchange of ideas and opinion, and laid the basis for continuing regroupment efforts. The conference was thus an optimistic move toward beginning the regroupment of forces that will make the American Revolution.

Robert Crisman

Seattle, Washington, March 30, 1988

I.

The American Revolution and Trotskyism

by Robert Crisman

Seattle, Washington, November 1985

Given the theme of my talk, I'd like to assert three things at the outset:

1) **Revolution in this country is decisive to the success of the world socialist upheaval.** The U.S. remains the capital of world capitalism, the epicenter of economic crisis, thief of labor and resources worldwide, noteholder to the debtor nations. It is the military life support for bourgeois dictators, armorer and financier of rightwing death squads, nuclear blackmailer of the world, breeder of fascism here and abroad, subverter of democracy and socialism on five continents.

All those who aspire to be free must reckon with the capitalist dictators on Wall Street.

2) **Revolution in the U.S. is coming sooner rather than later.** The era of capitalist reforms, buyoffs, collaboration, and pacification of the working class is over. The economic, social, and political crisis of the profit system mandates austerity and repression and cannot but prepare the ground for mass certitude that revolution is the only way out, cannot but engender the desperate willingness of the broad working masses to take the revolutionary road--provided that revolutionary leadership is present at the head of the struggle.

3) **U.S. Trotskyists are decisive to the success of the American Revolution.** Those who want freedom must win it. Only Marxism--the science of class struggle--lays the basis for common understanding of the revolutionary tasks at hand. Only Leninism--the method of welding a Marxist vanguard into a united striking arm against capital--can draw behind it the mass of workers and oppressed in a conscious and therefore implacable struggle for socialism. Only Trotskyism--rooted in Marxism and Leninism and standing on the theory of Permanent Revolution--can delineate the contours, dynamics, vicissitudes, and complexities of revolution in our time, organize the oppressed, and lead them to victory.

The American Question

Thirty-nine years ago, James P. Cannon, the first genius of American Bolshevism, wrote in his **Theses on the American Revolution**:

"The role of America is decisive. Should the European and colonial revolutions, now on the agenda of the day, precede in point of time the culmination of the struggle of the U.S., they would immediately be confronted with the necessity of defending their conquests against the economic and military assaults of the American imperialist monster.

The issue of socialism or capitalism will not finally be decided until it is decided in the U.S."

The **Theses** were ridiculed when they were first presented at the SWP's 12th National Convention in 1946. U.S. imperialism, after 17 years of depression and world war, nevertheless appeared invincible on the world arena--at least to the superficial, anti-Cannonist fainthearts and doubters, who soon left the SWP to join the Shachtmanites.

The **Theses** are ridiculed and ignored by many who call themselves Trotskyists today for the same reason--**and** on the pretext that recognition of the centrality of the U.S. to world revolution is nothing but American chauvinism--a national messianism completely at loggerheads with Bolshevik internationalism.

Cannon's "Americanism," however, was internationalist to the core, unlike the **anti**-American chauvinism of his past and present critics, who refuse to recognize the relative weight of the different nations, sectors, and class forces that confront one another in the matrix of international relations.

Cannon's assessment flows **inexorably** from Trotsky's theory of Permanent Revolution.

A key tenet of the theory is this: **The revolution is international in character and scope.** It is international precisely in that national liberation and democratic struggles in all countries--in the Third World, the west, and the workers' states--are indissolubly bound up with the success of proletarian revolution in the advanced industrial countries.

This internationalism is dictated by the character of the world capitalist economy, transcending all national limits which has created a worldwide network of productive forces, a world division of labor which subordinates on a world scale the countryside to the metropolis, worldwide financial interests, a worldwide repressive apparatus, and class struggle on a world scale.

All revolutions are bound up with the success of proletarian struggles in the advanced industrial countries. In Cannon's time and our own, this means that the question of socialism will be decided in the U.S.--still

the economic, political, and military center of gravity in the capitalist world.

Consider the **reality**: capitalist Europe and Japan operate as thieves under the American nuclear umbrella; the Soviet Union and China jockey for position in their competitive quest for "peaceful coexistence" with imperialism; Nicaragua, because of imperialism, dares not wage a thoroughgoing political offensive against its bankers and bishops, nor recognize the Atlantic Indians' right as nations to self-determination; South Africa, Israel, Zaire, Pakistan, El Salvador, the Philippines, and other police states on all continents are the client "democracies" of Uncle Sam; U.S. labor bureaucrats give back, sell out, and surrender to the bosses in hopes of labor "peace"; U.S. and world Stalinists and ex-Trotskyists scurry to accommodate the American imperialist offensive, and thus escape its heat.

We are nevertheless admonished that American power has declined since Cannon's time, that the U.S. is less important in the world scheme of things, that we needn't worry quite so much about making a revolution here at home. It is interesting that many who parrot this nonsense are also the first to bemoan the "inability" of the U.S. working class to get its revolutionary act together.

We say that U.S. weakness, relative to its unchallenged world pre-eminence in 1946, is just that--**relative**, and signifies nothing but the disintegration of the world capitalist system.

It certainly doesn't mean the accession of some other power to world supremacy.

In the first instance, no new **capitalist** power will arise to challenge U.S. pre-eminence, politically or militarily. The relative economic health of Japan, for example, is entirely dependent both upon American military protection and the fact that protection costs are borne by the U.S. working class. Japan and Europe will swim--and sink--with U.S. imperialism.

Nor does the disintegration of world capitalism mean the automatic success of the socialist revolution. The workers' states--saddled by bureaucracy, backwardness, internecine national rivalries, lack of access to world resources and technology, low productivity of labor--cannot and will not break the imperialist stranglehold. Already politically and economically deformed by world imperialist pressure, they will be caught up and destroyed in the death throes of the profit system if those death throes are not first cut short by workers' revolution in the west.

We are told that the accumulative power of Third World revolutions can somehow topple the U.S. colossus, that the revolutionary capture of the countryside will lead of itself to the fall of the metropolis.

This was the revolutionary "theory" of Maoism, whose armies wrested the ruined and defenseless cities of China from Chiang Kai-shek. It is the hope of Stalinists and the SWP, which cheerleads Cuba and Nicaragua while disavowing revolutionary potential and necessity at home.

It is indeed true that revolutions elsewhere shake the foundations of the metropolis, which rests on neocolonial subjugation and the containment of the deformed and degenerated workers' states. But the cities of imperialism are bristling fortresses, launching pads of holocaust, and breeders of fascism and imperialist war--the capitalist reaction to revolutionary crisis--which will engulf the world, if they are not eradicated at home by the workers.

In Defense of the American Theses

The roots of fascism and war **will** be dug up and tossed out here by American workers. We are **optimistic** about U.S. revolutionary prospects, the more so because we understand fully why revolution at home has not yet come to pass.

I want to speak here in defense of the American **Theses**. This landmark theoretical/political document of American and world Trotskyism, the highest application of the theory of Permanent Revolution to the American question, laid the basis for our understanding of the dynamics of U.S. class struggle, and for our firm belief in the revolutionary power of the working class in this country.

Much has been attempted to be made by Trotskyists of the failure of the **Theses** to predict correctly the tempo of post-war revolutionary developments in the U.S.

However, we think that a Marxist examination of this failure--rather than empirical sniping after the fact, as is invariably the case--is necessary, to disclose what lies behind the delay of the revolution, and thus show all the more clearly why we are American revolutionary optimists.

We insist first of all that in point of Marxist methodology, the **Theses** were correct in their assessment of U.S. revolutionary prospects.

Cannon had every good Marxist reason to believe that workers' revolution was around the corner in 1946--because of the worldwide economic and political crisis of capitalism, rooted in the developing colonial upheaval and in the decimation of world capitalist markets during World War II. No colonies, no wealth. No markets, no sale. No sale, no profits, no capitalism.

Cannon's assessment of U.S. workers and their revolutionary potential was just as methodologically correct. He cited as the basis for his assessment: their overwhelming numerical and social weight in U.S. society; their immense technical skill; their growing social and economic homogeneity at the time; their already-demonstrated willingness to defend their living standards against capitalist attack; the entry of Blacks as staunch militants into the unions during the war; workers' relative freedom from reformist prejudices.

All this was true as Trotskyism in 1946--the greatest strike year in U.S. labor history--and Cannon was certainly a realist in believing that U.S.

workers would make short work of the capitalists.

It didn't work out that way, obviously Cannon, like Trotsky, did not foresee that capitalism would be able to restabilize itself after World War II, just as Lenin had not foreseen the defeat of revolution in Europe after World War I.

Cannon ruled out the possibility of an organic revitalization of the profit system, and he was right. It took Keynesian pump-priming and permanent war spending, in conjunction with a worldwide political offensive, for the U.S. to be able to restore and develop a large part of the world market, and forestall, repress, distort, co-opt, and contain the world revolution for an entire historical epoch.

Only thus was the U.S. able to open up a prolonged period of prosperity after the war. The American bourgeoisie in turn was able to grant reforms and concessions, primarily in the form of economic benefits to the upper strata of U.S. workers, and thereby foster development of a largely straight white male labor aristocracy based in the trade unions. On this basis, the capitalists were able to fan the racist, sexist, homophobia, and national chauvinist bigotries that have historically separated the privileged from super-oppressed workers. And they were able to cement the growing identification of the privileged workers with the "American Way of Life" via the jingoist, redbaiting, brainwashing onslaught of McCarthyism.

McCarthyism **decapitated** the U.S. labor movement in the 1950s: radicals, women, people of color, lesbians and gay men, and immigrants were excluded wholesale from the labor movement, and in conjunction with this, a labor bureaucracy, culled from among the privileged workers, consolidated itself in the unions, to serve as the watchdog of privilege, transmitter of ruling class bigotries, and stifler of organized workers resistance. The bureaucracy was instrumental in eradicating class consciousness from an entire generation of U.S. workers, and in clamping a reformist equilibrium on the class struggle, that is only in this decade beginning to disintegrate.

Meanwhile, the struggles of super-oppressed U.S. workers--in the civil rights, women's, and lesbian/gay movements of the 1950s, '60s, and '70s--became the motor force of class struggle in this country. The fact that they were forced to develop **outside** the conservatized unions, however, and in opposition to the labor bureaucrats, heightened disorientation in the working class and among U.S. leftists, many of whom proved theoretically and practically unable to cope with the race and sex polarization that now shaped the workers' struggle.

Nowhere were the consequences of this failure to come to grips with the living dynamics of U.S. struggle more disastrous than inside the SWP.

The Dobbs-Kerry regime which succeeded Cannon to leadership of the party in the 1950s had come to radicalism from the ranks of the 1930s CIO militants who had since congealed as the labor aristocracy. Tied socially to this strata, the regime retained a laborite fixation on the conservatized unions as the exclusive arena of class struggle and on the backward aristocrats as the torchbearers of revolution. Women and

people of color they designated as mere--and secondary--"allies" of the workers.

Seeing as "real" workers only the backward elements led the SWP inevitably to a fatal erosion of belief in workers as a revolutionary power, a corollary reformism and opportunism in the labor and social movements, and finally, degeneration into Stalinism and deserved political death in the 1980s.

It is most telling and significant that Cannon's closest co-thinker, and co-author of the American **Theses**, Murry Weiss, despised the SWP's laborism, and fought it. In 1954, using the same Marxist analytical method that Cannon and he had brought to the writing of the **Theses**, Murry and Myra Tanner Weiss drafted the Trade Union Resolution which was adopted that year at the SWP's National Convention. The Resolution warned the party above all not to count on vanguard action by the worn-out, conservatized militants who had stormed the open-shop bastions and formed the CIO in the 1930s:

"The Party must look to new layers of potential militants and to women workers, the Negroes and other minority groups. They are the ones who will spearhead labor's political revitalization."

Dobbs and Kerry scrapped this prophetic Resolution and kept the porch-light on for the backward aristocrats. A decade later, they had succeeded in driving the Weiss group, all feminists and revolutionary integrationists, democracy, and Marxist politics in general out of the party.

Exit the SWP from the ranks of the American Revolution

The general failure of the U.S. Left--above all the SWP--in the 1950s and '60s to recognize the vital interconnections of race, sex, and class in the U.S., and to integrate these issues in theory and practice, reinforced and helped exacerbate the crippling divisions within the working class. Laborite reformist leftism bolstered white male chauvinism and the labor bureaucracy on the one hand, and allowed scope for the simultaneous resurgence of unvarnished reformism and pro-capitalist cultural national separatism in the women's, people of color, and lesbian/gay movements.

The resulting mutual polarization of all the various struggles--expressed most tellingly in the continued bureaucratic quiescence of organized labor--facilitated the U.S. government's decimation of 1960s protests and provided the opening for the rise of the current rightwing reaction.

Economic privilege for straight white male unionists; promulgation of multiple bigotries within the working class; the rise and consolidation of the labor bureaucracy; the failure of much of the Left to fight the

chauvinist bureaucrats: these are the factors that have throttled worker radicalization since the war.

The very rise of rightwing reaction, however, along with the burgeoning U.S. war offensive, **signal that the reformist equilibrium maintained by the bureaucrats is disintegrating.**

Capitalism--wracked by world revolution and its own growing inner contradictions--can no longer afford to dole out privileges and reforms. Its only way out of crisis is austerity, increased repression, fascism, and war.

Reforms and reformists have had their day. Meanwhile, the workers, especially the most oppressed, are beginning to fight back against the reaction. The working class as a **whole** will soon move past the political torpor of reformism.

Class warfare is escalating now in the trenches--at abortion clinics, in the affirmative action and comparable worth struggles, the fight for union democracy, the AIDS and gay rights battle, the fight for Native American sovereignty, for community control of education, for immigrant rights, at Phelps-Dodge, at Watsonville, at the Seattle Human Rights Department, and on a thousand other fronts. And in virtually every case, the reactionaries focus their attacks on the super-oppressed working majority--the non-white, non-male, non-straight workers ignored and repudiated for so long by the bureaucrats and leftist laborites.

These struggles, and the hue and gender identification of the opposing forces involved, delineate the present configuration of U.S. class struggle overall, and indicate what we must do to make a revolution in this country.

Fascism, to conquer, must recruit an army--and it is recruiting one now from among the misogynists, redbaiters, racebaiters, homophobes, scabs, and chauvinists of America. Multi-issue bigotry--dividing the privileged workers from the super-oppressed, and the latter from each other--is the "strength" of the fascists

An **attack** on that bigotry--**expressed in defense of the most oppressed on every front**--is **our** strength, and will unite the working class in the overthrow of capital.

Who or what capitalist force can stand against the united, class-conscious super-oppressed majority of American workers, moreover, who have laid their hands on the key levers of capitalist finance and industry; who are the clericals and computer operators in the communications, transport, and banking industries and in government; whose fingers transmit the orders that fill production and determine the flow of capital; who code the payrolls; who **run** the capitalist system and can shut it down tomorrow?

Can it be any surprise that these workers have begun to transform the labor movement itself in the 1970s and '80s? They fight the bigots and the bureaucrats most intransigently in the unions. They are the connecting link between the labor and the great social movements.

They raise abortion rights, affirmative action, job and housing integration, community control of police, comparable worth, and so forth as class struggle issues. They connect these issues with the battles against apartheid and the U.S. war drive. And just as they bring to the class struggle its living social content, they raise workplace battles--job safety, wage discrimination, takebacks, job segregation, the right to speak freely and organize on the job--as social issues of the first magnitude, the more so as these issues are shaped by the racist, sexist, homophobic dynamic of society.

The super-oppressed have been pushed into motion, and into the forefront of the class war, precisely by the objective logic of this dynamic. Reaction for them poses, among all else, the question of survival--an excellent spur to the development of revolutionary consciousness and will. Imbued with this requisite consciousness and will, these workers will **unite** and transform the entire working class into an unstoppable force for socialism.

Enter Trotskyism

Why a leading role for Trotskyists in the American Revolution?

Because we--as the inheritors of Marx, Lenin, Trotsky, and Cannon, as theorists and practitioners of revolutionary politics--have come to grips with and understand the complexities and trajectory of workers' struggles in the post-war era.

We alone on the Left have understood the revolutionary implications of the interconnections of race, sex, and class in the U.S., and applied that understanding as revolutionaries in the movements for social and economic change.

We have developed in living interaction with the most oppressed: we have celebrated their victories and suffered the agony of their defeats; we have learned from their struggles, been teachers as well, and contended for leadership among them. We stand with them as one against the common enemy.

We **are** the most oppressed--and **more** than that. We are the vanguard, the Bolsheviks the theorists, the organized and organizing core cadre--the ones who will build the **party** that leads the coming American Revolution.

Without a Leninist party, **nothing** can be done to topple the capitalist state in America--that powerful, sophisticated, organized, centralized, murderous repressive apparatus of the U.S. ruling class.

We **need** a Leninist party--a democratic centralist party, rooted in Marxist method and doctrine--with a **program** that speaks to the needs and demands of the working oppressed, consciously, coherently, with the express purpose of uniting them in an intransigent struggle for socialism.

We need a party that counterposes itself to the notion of "spontaneous"

revolutionism; that recognizes the historically given heterogeneity and consequent limited political understanding of the working class as a whole; that first seeks to attract and train the conscious vanguard minority of workers; that will orient them toward organizing the broad battalions of the class for revolution.

No force or form of organization other than the Bolshevik party has yet been discovered that can work with the masses in their backwardness, their mutual differences and antagonisms, their weaknesses, and educate them to their real interests and underlying strength and make of them a force that can overthrow the advanced capitalist state.

We **insist** on a democratic centralist party--one that speaks to the workers with a single voice--yet which allows the widest freedom of discussion and debate inside the party, so that ideas and proposals can be presented, thrashed out and clarified without fear or favor--and intelligent action arrived at thereby.

Without centralism, no coherent leadership of workers' struggles is possible. Yet without democracy in the party--up to and including the right to form factions--comrades cannot test themselves and each other in the clash and clarification of ideas. Who then can learn and apply the arts of Bolshevik leadership in the party or the world at large?

A Bolshevik party is the present crying need of our revolution. We see this as the necessary aim and purpose of Trotskyist regroupment.

We are well aware of the rush of Trotskyists, in the wake of the degeneration of the SWP, to regroup with other leftists and forces without first having worked out a **programmatic agreement**, i.e., agreement with regard to understanding and acting on the essential questions of the class war. These precipitous efforts are being undertaken on the premise that "united action" now in the mass movements will somehow lead to broader initiatives, and eventually to a cohesive, "mass" anti-capitalist offensive.

We have no quarrel with united fronts, we in CRSP (Committee for a Revolutionary Socialist Party) and the FSP (Freedom Socialist Party) have initiated, led, and participated in many such fronts over the last two decades.

But, by themselves, these fronts can only be limited and transient; they tend to fall apart under the pressure of events as tactical, strategic and inevitably programmatic alternatives--and thus disagreements--present themselves.

The very **necessity** for united fronts arises out of the political differences and antagonisms that divide the working class. And they come to nothing if the vanguard is not **simultaneously** making an overriding effort to reach programmatic clarity and unity, to elaborate a common program, commensurate with the scope and depth of the capitalist offensive, that will serve as the basis for a unified workers' offensive against capital.

Our primary task as Trotskyists is to thrash out such a program, build the Bolshevik party, and make the American Revolution.

II.

What Went Wrong with the Socialist Workers Party?

by Stephen Durham

New York, New York, November 1985

Trotsky opens **The Death Agony of Capitalism and the Tasks of the Fourth International** by saying: "The world political situation as a whole is chiefly characterized by an historical crisis of leadership of the proletariat." This fundamental feature of our historical period and the primary factor in the retardation of the international revolution challenges Trotskyists everywhere to rise to the exigencies of our time and embrace the task of forging revolutionary leadership in every arena of the class struggle.

In the U.S., this crisis of leadership--based on petty bourgeois pessimism, opportunism and a perfidious accommodation to Stalinism--finds its most acute expression in the Socialist Workers Party (SWP). The decline of the SWP is a pivotal event in the development of American Trotskyism. Principled regroupment and the regeneration of U.S. Trotskyism heads the revolutionary agenda today because, in twenty years of degeneration, the SWP has lost its equilibrium. It will never be the party of the American Revolution.

How does a Trotskyist party, founded as a vehicle for revolution, become a roadblock? We must analyze and learn from the twists and turns of the SWP in its downward spiral from the heights of revolutionary leadership in the 1940s and '50s to the depths of degeneration in the '70s and '80s. From such an analysis we can delineate the tasks and define the course we must pursue in the reconstitution of American Trotskyism, and with it, the resolution of the crisis of proletarian leadership in the U.S.

All of us here--along with legions of grassroots activists--developed in opposition to the unprincipled SWP politics in the labor, people of

color, feminist, lesbian and gay, and radical movements. We all know activists who either dropped out of politics in disgust or slid into reformism as a direct result of the bankrupt misleadership of the SWP. But there are many who held on. Some of these have prospered as SWP adversaries, revolutionary activists and defenders of Trotskyist theory. And we here today welcome the challenge of building a revolutionary alternative to the SWP. The fact we are gathered at this conference to discuss the programmatic basis for democratic and principled regroupment is a clear sign of the health and vibrancy of the revolutionary traditions of U.S. Trotskyism.

Understanding why the SWP degenerated is also key to understanding the crisis of international Trotskyism. The SWP's role, under the leadership of James Cannon, in founding the international movement and the party's influence as the traditional voice of Trotskyism in the heartland of international capitalism imbue the current SWP with an international respect that is completely unwarranted today given its violation of every tenet of Trotskyism.

Trotsky said that the question of worldwide socialism would be decided on American soil. With the same logic, we can say today that the resolution of the international crisis of revolutionary leadership is inextricably tied to the reconstitution of U.S. Trotskyism.

In this important task of analyzing the SWP, we have a double responsibility. First, to ourselves: we must not repeat the SWP's errors. And second, to the international movement! Trotskyists worldwide need to hear what we have to say about the causes of the derailment and complete demise of the SWP.

Radical Laborism and the Degeneration of the SWP

The founders of the Freedom Socialist Party began their analysis of the degeneration of the SWP while still in the SWP's ranks. The Seattle branch of the party submitted a minority organization resolution, "Radical Laborism vs. Bolshevik Leadership", to the discussion bulletin in preparation for the 21st National Party Convention in 1965. This document, along with a minority political resolution entitled "Crisis in Leadership", constitute the ideological basis for the split between the SWP and its Seattle branch in 1966, a division which culminated in the formation of the Freedom Socialist Party (FSP).

Radical laborism, epitomized by the Dobbs-Kerry regime drove us from the SWP and set the theoretical, programmatic and organizational stage for the rise to bureaucratic hegemony of the current anti-Trotskyist Waters-Barnes machine. Its emergence represented a rejection of the essential nature of the unfolding of Permanent Revolution on U.S. soil and signaled the SWP's first steps on the road to the total repudiation of Trotskyism in the 1980s.

We characterize the SWP's early veering away from Bolshevism as **radical**, because the SWP, at the time, was still influenced by a powerful residue of revolutionary socialist traditions. We use the term **laborite**, because the party regime believed that socialist politics would

develop exclusively through a labor party based on the unions. Radical laborism eroded the party's rich arsenal of Marxist theory. Through tight control over party life and through the bureaucratic delineation of political priorities, the Dobbs-Kerry regime trampled on party democracy and simultaneously insulated the SWP from the corrective influence of active engagement with the most combative, vanguard elements of the class struggle.

In "Radical Laborism vs. Bolshevik Leadership", we described the party and its leadership as we saw it in 1965. The main characteristics of this analysis hold true for the SWP today:

"As a consequence of the single-minded, unionistic blueprint for revolution, the Party has become increasingly constricted, conservative, and turned inward. This produces, in turn, deepening errors of theory, program, strategy and tactics in those areas demanding the greatest familiarity and precision of evaluation: the Black struggle, the labor movement, women's emancipation and revolutionary regroupment.

The chief characteristics of the Radical Laborites are fourfold: they are anti-interventionist, contemptuous of theory, union-bound in strategical orientation, and politically unstable in their reactions to any given juncture."

How did the radical laborites manage to kill the Bolshevik initiative which put the SWP center stage in the tumultuous labor upsurge of the late 1930s and propelled it into the vanguard as the only principled radical opposition on the U.S. Left to American involvement in World War II? The answer to this question lies in looking at the specific problems and pressure on the revolutionary fiber of the party in the post-war period.

In 1946, Cannon looked forward to the emergence of the SWP as the mass party of the American Revolution. That year, an unparalleled strike wave swept U.S. industry. American G.I.'s throughout the world demanded to be returned to the U.S. and protested the permanent militarization of the American empire at home and abroad.

Cannon knew that despite the victories of the party in the C.I.O. upsurge, the SWP could not afford to rest on its laurels and fail to arm the party theoretically against the illusions and challenges of post-WWII prosperity. The bosses were talking about the "American Century" and declaring the invincibility of capitalism. Cannon, who had lived through a similar period of prosperity in the 1920s and had witnessed the disorientation of workers and the Left, collaborated with Murry Weiss to write and secure the party's approval for **The Theses on the American Revolution** in 1946. These theses are the application

of the tenets of Permanent Revolution to the postwar period. Cannon understood then, as we do now, that a revolutionary party in the U.S., under the thumb of the most powerful ruling class ever to emerge, cannot survive without the ballast of revolutionary theory.

When the promise of postwar prosperity failed to materialize and the expectations of workers and the middle class were eroded by inflation, McCarthyism arose to dismantle the gains of labor and drive the Left, women, people of color and gays out of the labor movement. The SWP lost its base in the unions, but survived intact because it refused to repudiate its revolutionary principles and managed to link up with fresh upsurges outside the labor movement. Only later did the reactionary decimation of the labor movement and the growing conservatism of the privileged layer of workers manage to erode the revolutionary traditions of the SWP. How did this happen?

The answer lies in the social composition, political experience and limited vistas of the Dobbs-Kerry regime. Proletarian in composition but organically linked to the relatively privileged layers of labor, and limited in revolutionary organizing experience to the massive unionization drives of industrial labor in the late 1930s, Dobbs and Kerry and their supporters in the SWP became a transmission belt for the backwardness and conservatism of predominantly white male unionized labor into the heart of the SWP.

Radical laborites refused to recognize that the class struggle was most alive outside the unions, especially in the race and sex liberation movements.

To mold the SWP in their own image, Dobbs and Kerry gained control over the party apparatus by manipulating voting blocs and forcing organizational rule changes to silence political dissidents, in crass imitation of labor bureaucrats. In a complete distortion of democratic centralism, they instituted a monolithic centralism, which subordinated the party's program to their organizational control.

Refusing to intervene in the class struggle and provide revolutionary leadership which could guide labor away from its retreat, the SWP chose to go into a sectarian holding operation which shunned multi-faceted revolutionary activism until some future date when the labor movement would rise again. Then and only then would the SWP step from the shadows of its self-imposed isolation to become the party of the American revolution.

From Radical Laborism to the Junking of Trotskyism

The massive radicalization of U.S. labor did not take place as expected by the radical laborites.

What did the SWP do? The party heads lost all faith in the capacity of American workers to overthrow capitalism. Political theory died in the SWP, and with it, the confidence and will to build the American Revolution. The SWP, disoriented and cynical, became the breeding ground for an unholy anti-Trotskyist opportunism. This is the chief

characteristic of the Barnes regime whose roots lie in the non-proletarian and opportunist SWP campus recruitment drives of the late 1960s and '70s.

Opportunism--the desire to gain popularity and influence with the masses no matter what the cost to revolutionary principle--has ruled the SWP for years and finds its clearest expression in the Barnesite repudiation of the theory of Permanent Revolution. The SWP vacillated wildly throughout the 1970s between slavish tail-ending and haughty disdain for every mass movement which had the misfortune to become the focus for the party's intervention.

In 1978, the SWP made its infamous "turn to industry" which drove outservice workers, secretaries and white collar workers who protested the party's blue collar marching orders. When hard times hit heavy industry, SWPers were laid off in droves. As a consequence, the SWP is today even more isolated from the labor movement than ever before. The SWP's "turn to industry" only compounded its pessimism and opportunism.

The SWP's international perspective is a reflection of its gloomy view of the prospects for the American Revolution. After years of Stalinophobic sectarianism flowing directly from the party's radical laborite holding operation, the SWP under Barnes and Waters has reversed course. International sectarianism has given way to the crassest opportunism--which like its Stalinophobic antecedent--is based on a fundamentally conservative and bureaucratic distrust of the revolutionary potential of workers.

The SWP now gives unrestrained support to every leader of an anti-imperialist revolution, including the anti-communist, misogynist, anti-gay butcher of the Iranian Revolution--Ayatollah Khomeini. And paving the way for the SWP's recent repudiation of Permanent Revolution, the party declared in 1981 that it was time to "get closer" to the leaderships of the Cuban, Nicaraguan and Grenadian revolutions.

The SWP's rejection of Permanent Revolution and the resurrection of the Menshevik/Stalinist theory of revolution in stages is the repudiation of both the American Revolution and the living world revolution. The SWP's opportunism has been transmitted to the international Trotskyist movement through an unprincipled organizational agreement between the Mandel leadership of the Fourth International and the SWP. This "gentleman's agreement" is a dangerous pact to ignore fundamental disagreements on Trotskyism in order to maintain organizational unity in the Fourth International.

This pact was struck at the 12th World congress and sealed by Mandel's reluctance to open a debate and investigation into the reasons for the SWP's abandonment of Permanent Revolution. This unprincipled organizational combination--a malady of American Trotskyism that Cannon fought against and the Dobbs-Kerry regime reveled in--will prove fatal for the Fourth International unless reversed. In politics, it is suicidal to consummate organizational deals with political opponents at the expense of political allies. The refusal of the leadership of the Fourth International to take on the SWP politically has only resulted in giving up ground to the anti-Trotskyist renegades.

For Trotskyist Regroupment

As radicals in the heartland of international counterrevolution, we face the challenge of rebuilding U.S. Trotskyism--a responsibility of worldwide significance. We **need** a new party of the American Revolution. To build that party, we first must join together in a principled and vigorous regroupment effort based on the demands, militance and initiative of the workers at the heart of the U.S. class struggle--women, people of color, lesbians and gays, immigrants, the disabled and youth. Only with a living connection to the most intensely exploited and, therefore, the most dynamic section of the working class will we be able to navigate the steady decline and decay of capitalism and succeed in providing revolutionary leadership to the U.S. labor and mass movements. Only in this way can we do our part to solve the crisis of proletarian leadership and make our necessary and unique contribution to the international liberation struggles that are inextricably bound up with the battles here.

Today, as thousands of Trotskyists the world over are seeking a way past the SWP's errors and the Fourth International's accommodation to these errors, we look toward principled debate and collaboration on the tasks facing the U.S. and international revolution

We in the Committee for a Revolutionary Socialist Party and the Freedom Socialist Party call on other Trotskyists to join us in the urgent task of forging an American Bolshevik party with the boldness, tenacity and theoretical foundations to carry our banner forward to socialism.

III.

Women's Emancipation and Permanent Revolution

by Monica Hill

Los Angeles, California, November 1985

"Women are the unacknowledged leadership of the proletariat today." I like to think these conclusive words are my own, but they're not. They are Murry Weiss', a leader of the Socialist Workers Party in its best years, who was National Co-Chair of the Committee for a Revolutionary Socialist Party (CRSP) and my comrade in the Freedom Socialist Party (FSP) until his death in 1981. Murry taught me and other comrades the meaning of the Theory of Permanent Revolution. He learned the theory from Trotsky. Trotsky learned it from Marx. Each successive generation has expanded and enriched its meaning. The continuity of this theory, a cornerstone of Trotskyism, is reassuring to us as internationalists and as U. S. Trotskyists. For it is our task to deepen and solidify world revolution by leading the U.S. revolution. And if we don't understand the Theory of Permanent Revolution and apply it with wide-open vision, we simply won't be able to do our job

Back to Basics

Murry Weiss, and Comrade Robert Crisman who is with us today at this conference, succinctly define the theory in a **Freedom Socialist** newspaper article written in 1982:

"Permanent Revolution is the process of **world-wide, uninterrupted, and uninteruptible** struggle of all oppressed people, Led by the proletariat, for economic, social and political liberation.

Its main tenets are:

- 1) The unfinished bourgeois-democratic tasks of humanity can only be carried through by proletarian socialist revolution. This is the gist of the theory.
- 2) Revolution does not stop at the proletarian dictatorship but continues as political clashes in the cultural, social, and economic spheres throughout each successive stage on the way to classless society.
- 3) Permanent Revolution is international in character and scope.

Permanent Revolution today takes aim at the capitalist state, its institutions and the vast interlocking system of human and social relations that form the matrix of world bourgeois oppression... It bases itself on the **mutual interdependence** of proletarian and all other liberation struggles."

The Theory of Permanent Revolution not only defines the character of a particular revolution; **it identifies the leadership** necessary to carry out that revolution. In pre-Revolutionary Tsarist Russia, the great debate revolved around what roles the peasantry and workers would play in the revolution.

History decided, verifying Trotsky's prognosis; the Russian Revolution proved that the workers would and must lead.

Here in the U.S., the debate around leadership of the revolution is not around worker vs. peasant; it is rather, which **sector** of the working class must lead the revolution.

Lenin anticipated polarized sectors within the working class. In **Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism**, he wrote:

"It is quite **possible to bribe** the labour leaders and the upper stratum of the labour aristocracy. And the capitalists of the "advanced" countries are bribing them; they bribe them in a thousand different ways, direct and indirect, overt and covert.

This stratum of bourgeoisified workers, or the "labour aristocracy," who are quite Philistine in their mode of life, in the size of their earnings and in their outlook, serve as the principal prop of the Second International, and, in our days, the principal **social** (not military) **prop of the bourgeoisie**. They are the **agents of the bourgeoisie in the labour movement**, the labour lieutenants of the capitalist class, real channels of reformism and chauvinism."

Lenin's description anticipated what we clearly face today. An enormous capitalist bureaucracy proliferates in the U.S. But even that vast organism is not the main strength of the capitalist class. **The pervasive power of American imperialism lies in its labor bureaucracy**. And this bureaucracy is not merely a layer of misleaders, traitors, and gangsters, with links to the FBI, CIA and the Mafia. It is certainly all of that, but it is sustained by a huge, sociologically entrenched stratum of privileged straight white males (the labor aristocracy) who provide and engender enormous social support to the bourgeoisie.

Clara Fraser, a founder of the FSP, defines this sociological phenomenon more specifically than Lenin could in 1920. She writes in **On the Dialectics of U.S. "Backwardness"**:

"Given the class-collaboration politics of the U.S worker, the culture of bigotry and misogyny lock the privileged white males into a prison of conservative or slow reformism....

White skin privilege, male chauvinism, and heterosexism have turned millions of workers into lackeys of the boss, shorn of class consciousness and permeated with elitism. This is the social base of the labor bureaucracy."

And Now to the Heart of the Matter

True Trotskyists adhere to the Theory of Permanent Revolution. The "Back-to-the-Peasant" tendencies exemplified by Stalinists and former Trotskyists like the Socialist Workers Party (SWP) is indeed "back"--backward! This is crystal clear in the U.S. which **has** no peasantry.

What **does** it have? A **new** working class. As Fraser puts it:

"...The aristocrats of labor, the labor lieutenants of the capitalist class, are the ebbtide sector in the labor movement, being swiftly replaced and ignored by the army of new worker militants from the ranks of women, youth, minorities, and lesbians and gays. These low-paid powerless strata are the majority and leading edge of the new American working class, and their consciousness is light years ahead of the moribund chauvinists..."

At one pole then, stands this sinister union bureaucracy. At the other pole are the future leaders of the U.S. revolution--the most oppressed workers. And who are they? Women, people of color, the youth, lesbians and gays, elders, the differently-abled--all the oppressed who don't have economic privileges to lose. They have nothing to lose but their chains!

As Weiss and Crisman say: "Women's massive entry into the modern proletariat, their continuing existence as the most oppressed within each repressed sector--and their demonstrated will to fight it--have conjoined today to make female fighters the radicalizing, unifying **leaders** of world anti-capitalist struggle."

Herein lies the solution to the current crisis in leadership on the Left. And herein lies the verification and life-blood of Permanent Revolution.

The FSP has been saying this for 20 years--not because we are particularly visionary or predominantly women, but because we reject blindfolds and apply Marxist theory as it was meant to be applied: to ever-changing realities.

Once upon a time, the vast majority of the U.S. working class were white male, blue-collar workers engaged in heavy industrial production. This is no longer true. The majority of jobs in this country are not in heavy industry, but in light industry--banking, communication, transportation, high-tech businesses, and services--and they are performed by women and people of color in both the private and public sectors.

The FSP has said this over and over again to various Marxist tendencies. They reply that non-industrial workers are not really workers, but just "kind-of" workers. This redefinition of "working class" would astound Marx. But it explains how such Marxists relegate women workers to a peripheral rather than central role in the revolution. In their myopic, schematic and deadbeat application of Marxist theory, women are not workers at all, so how could they possibly be the leaders of a workers revolution!

Practically speaking, are we really to hope that our revolution rests in the shaky hands of a shrinking, conservatized sector of the U.S. proletariat, or in the hands of expanding, militant and radicalized women workers?

Take Off the Blindfolds, Gentlemen

Women are 50% of the U.S. working class and together with their commonly oppressed people of color and lesbian and gay coworkers, make up 75% of the entire work force. Women average 56% of men's wages; people of color average 70% of white wages.

This strength of numbers, combined with the heavy degree of shared exploitation, make the recognition of their leadership a matter of revolutionary expediency that cannot be ignored. It shows in the union movement.

In this Reaganesque era of concerted union-busting, predominantly male unions are losing and predominantly women's and people of color unions are winning, or at least holding fast. PATCO went under, Greyhound drivers made deep compromises. Grocery industry Teamsters and meatcutters are headed in the same direction. In southern California, the union bureaucrats are negotiating two-tier contracts which will discriminate against women, minorities, and young workers. The Teamsters and meatcutters unions have refused to call on the Retail Clerks to strike with them, and are not picketing the majority of the struck stores because they don't want to pressure the mostly women clerks to honor the picket line. Such sexist condescension to the rank-and-file clerks is an outrage. It will also lose the strike.

On the winning side of labor struggles are the union women and people

of color. Hospital and hotel workers in New York City won their strikes. Clerical and technical workers on campus are winning union contracts for the first time. The backbone of the phone workers strike last year were the women--operators and clericals. Comparable worth is gaining ground in union contracts. These are the workers who look to the future and who will push organized labor into the 21st century. The organized Left, especially Trotskyists, who haven't abandoned revolution to centuries hence, belong with this vanguard sector of our class.

And Join The Whole Class

Most leftists at least pay lip service to the goal of equality for women, and many genuinely believe in it--at least personally. But when it comes to building and practicing women's **leadership** in the revolutionary process, none but the FSP, as far as I know, **does** it. This is not only a pity. It is a counter-revolutionary travesty, intentional or not.

A case in point is the flaming struggle around abortion rights. Just as male Marxists try to banish women to the sidelines of the working class, so too do they sidestep around the critical issues of the women's movement. Right here and now, feminists are fighting a heavy rightwing attack on abortion rights. But where is the support from our leftist allies? Token at best.

They are not to be seen on the front line, defending clinics from goonish demonstrators. They are not even supporting abortion defense in multi-issue coalitions such as last spring's April 20th coalition. In Los Angeles, every Trotskyist tendency except for the FSP and International Workers Party (4th International) (IWP) tail-ended the Stalinists and voted against including defense of abortion rights in the coalition's rally slogans. These backstabbers included Socialist Action, Socialist Unity, Workers Power, and Fourth International Tendency (FIT). Several days later, these same leftists, who assured us that they "personally" support abortion rights, were nowhere to be seen as 15 of us found ourselves facing a rally of 5,000 Americans Against Abortion.

Such lack of solidarity, frankly, stinks. Not to mention that it is thoroughly anti-Marxist. After all, it doesn't take a genius to recognize that women's right to abortion is a fundamental challenge to the nuclear family which is the socio-economic basis of capitalism. And it doesn't take a genius to recognize that the anti-abortion assault is a ruling class rightwing attack against the working class. As Trotskyist socialist feminists, we demand that other Trotskyists stop selling us out and join the struggle for abortion rights. Give some meaning to that ringing slogan of class solidarity--an injury to one is an injury to all!

The abortion struggle is just one example of how Permanent Revolution has struck deeply and boldly inside the imperialist heartland in new and unexpected ways, and in advance of the long-delayed proletarian overthrow itself. Fierce liberation struggles on issues of sex, race, sexuality, and human relations have exploded in the industrial countries. The attendant social, familial, and moral upheavals, which

even Trotsky tended to regard as matters for post-capitalist society, batter again and again at the rotten hulk of bourgeois society. And all of these fights have infiltrated and integrated themselves into the proletarian struggle becoming, in fact, its motor force.

Toward an American Revolution in Our Time

Revolutionary feminism is the only program and method that can truly unite the class and the Trotskyist movement, for it is a unity based on equality and mutual respect and not on a lower caste sacrificing itself for an upper caste. Women, people of color, lesbians, youth, elders and the differently-abled just **happen** to be the most exploited sectors of the proletariat. We as Trotskyists are obliged to hoist our banner with them. As Murry Weiss wrote in **Draft Resolution on Permanent Revolution and Women's Liberation**:

"The vanguard revolutionaries--those who are linked to the most oppressed strata of the people--will draw the masses after them and forge a mighty Marxist-Leninist-Trotskyist-Socialist-Feminist party that will be more than a match for the imperialists.

Such is the promise and the burning reality of the pivotal place of women contending for their own, and for everybody's emancipation from a society they never made. Such is the reality of Permanent Revolution in our time."

IV.

Lesbian and Gay Liberation: A Trotskyist Analysis

by Merle Woo

San Francisco, California, November 1985

The theory of Permanent Revolution delineates the historical fact that every democratic struggle for full economic, political and social equality of every oppressed group today is inherently tied to the victory of socialism. The interaction of this theory with modern changing

conditions explains the integral connection between gay liberation and class oppression.

Permanent Revolution heralds the revolutionary leadership role of lesbians and gays in the fight for socialism on American soil.

The death agony of capitalism and the retardation of socialist revolution in the U.S. have brought about a unification of all the oppressed on a level never seen before. In the anti-apartheid, reproductive rights, Central American coalitions, for example, it is not uncommon today to hear activists of every political persuasion addressing racism, sexism and class exploitation. But the struggle against heterosexism is too often excluded--gay oppression is put on the back burner--and if addressed at all, is merely given lip service. This is because many fail to grasp Permanent Revolution and understand how sexual freedom in general and homosexuality in particular interconnects with class oppression.

The U.S. Left has gone through various twists and turns and opportunistic interventions, focusing more on recruitment of warm bodies rather than developing a theoretical analysis which would address the material oppression of lesbians and gays and provide the basis for turning the movement into a vehicle for revolutionary change.

Stalin's Anti-Gay Legacy

Stalinism, in its theoretical reaction against the material gains of women and gays in the October Revolution, gave birth to the anti-Marxist theory of the revolutionary nuclear family, which unscientifically defined homosexuality as a product of capitalist bourgeois decadence.

The effect of this false theory was the imprisonment and murder of lesbians and gays during Stalin's reign and the incineration of German gays in Nazi concentration camps.

But this defeat did not signal the death of the gay movement in the 20th century. In 1969, rising out of the rebellion of Blacks, women, anti-war activists, student radicals, and international liberation struggles, the Stonewall street riots, led by New York City Black and Puerto Rican drag queens, gave birth to the modern international lesbian and gay movement.

Not only all of capitalist America, but every left current was forced to deal with the question of a new and unanticipated insurgency. Stalinism and Maoism (a variant of Stalinism), both theoretically bankrupt and anti-feminist to the core, mouthed their tired pro-nuclear family slogans and relegated gay rights into oblivion, a tertiary contradiction.

Secondhand Stalinism

The Socialist Workers Party (SWP), under the influence of radical

laborism and habitually tail-ending the anti-feminists, homophobes, and Black cultural nationalists, was slow to respond to the militancy and rage of the gay rights upsurge.

After a few superficial flirtations with the New York movement, the SWP regime turned tail and implemented anti-gay membership policies throughout the Party. They didn't want to turn off Blacks and labor. In 1970, Ed Shaw stated that the Party is not a "hospital" for people needing therapy, and gays were banned from Young Socialist Alliance (YSA) for alleged security reasons in a gross mimicry of McCarthyite reaction. The Gay Liberation Fronts in the early 1970s forged ahead and experienced massive growth, and the SWP did an about-face only because the gay movement was now seen as fertile ground for recruiting.

Under pressure from the party ranks, the SWP carried out a rich internal discussion on the question of lesbian and gay liberation. But this exercise in party democracy and theoretical flowering concluded with a cynical repudiation of the movement. Nat Weinstein of San Francisco (and later of Socialist Action) led the attack within the Party. He advanced an anti-gay position which became the party line and eventually drove open lesbians and gays out of the organization.

The gist of this Stalinoid policy was: 1) Workers, women, and oppressed nationalities are more subjugated than gays because they have no closet to escape into; 2) Gays are a behavioral minority struggling against psychological oppression; 3) Too close an association with gay liberation would give the SWP an "exotic image" and alienate it from the masses.

Unstable and contradictory, the SWP in the 1970s vacillated between opportunistic interventions and abandonment. The SWP, where it was involved in organizations like the Gay Activist Alliances, promoted the retreat of the movement away from radical politics by redbaiting radicals and feminists in crass accommodation to petit-bourgeois gay businessmen and reformist movement politicians, most of whom were representatives of the Democratic Party.

This SWP policy was an insult to the intelligence of grassroots activists and made the job of principled radicals doubly difficult. In effect, they had no analysis--and said only that lesbian and gay oppression is the product of reactionary ideas and sexual taboos.

The SWP ignores the revolutionary potential of the gay struggle that emanates from its relationship to feminism and its direct confrontation with the basic socio-economic unit of capitalism--the patriarchal nuclear family.

FSP, Engels and Gay Liberation

The Freedom Socialist Party (FSP)--which left the SWP in part because the SWP refused to place women's emancipation on the level of a first-class theoretical and programmatic question--was prepared by its Trotskyist heritage to develop a materialist analysis of the gay question.

This multi-issue, socialist feminist analysis put the Party on the front line of freedom, raising the banner of gay liberation and becoming the most consistent voice of revolutionary politics in the movement.

Our analysis of gay and lesbian oppression is based upon the Marxist theory expounded by Engels in **The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State**.

Engels describes the materialist roots of women's oppression. This analysis is the basis for understanding the materialist roots of gay oppression as well because the status of the role of gay people has always been integrally linked up with the status of the role of women in matriarchal and class societies.

Today, there is abundant evidence to prove that in matriarchal societies, homosexuality was fully accepted. This is because, in the absence of private property in primitive communism, there was no material basis for the enslavement of women and sex-role stereotyping. In some North American tribes, for example, homosexuals not only were respected but were considered to have unusual mystical powers, and they frequently attained the position of spiritual leader of the tribe.

Under societies led by women, society collectively consumed all it produced. There was no surplus production, and therefore no private property and no necessity to transfer wealth or rank through the institution of the patriarchal nuclear family. Instead there existed a matriarchal egalitarian kinship system which had important ramifications for women and homosexuals. Sexuality clearly was not restricted by the institution of monogamous marriage. The point here is that under the matriarchy, there was no material basis for sex and gender oppression.

The Origins of Class Struggle

Engels states that the "world historical defeat of the female sex" occurred with the overthrow of mother right, the rise of private property and the patriarchal monogamous family.

In **The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State**, Engels also wrote:

"In an old unpublished manuscript written by Marx and myself in 1846, I find the words: 'The first division of labor is that between man and woman for the propagation of children.' And today I can add: The first class opposition that appears in history coincides with the development of the antagonism between man and woman in monogamous marriage, and the first class oppression coincides with that of the female sex by the male."

The first class oppression, that of women by men, emerged from the existing division of labor. Men held dominion over cattle in the same way women had dominion over the home and domestic tools. The herds provided the first surpluses, and therefore, the first private property. Accumulated wealth became the property of individual men. Then, the monogamous family unit emerged to provide for descent of accumulated wealth through the male line and to guarantee the paternity of heirs. Monogamy for the women, consequently, became essential. Women moved from primary productive labor for the community to private, isolated domestic labor for individual families, and so were removed from social production and power. Of course, women did not accept this defeat easily and blood warfare *a la* the Amazons attests to this.

In Western society, especially, we can see that with the rise of private property and the monogamous family, came the institutionalized oppression of women and homosexuals through the Church, the state, and all cultural, medical and social establishments. This resulted in the tyranny of the monogamous family over women and gays. There had to be a taboo against homosexuality because lesbians and gay men prove that life can be full and satisfying outside the nuclear family.

By their very existence, lesbians and gays challenge and defy the nuclear family and women's subordination. They are not interested in subordinating women in marriage or relationships; they challenge stereotypes and sexual role models of masculinity (dominant, aggressive and powerful) and femininity (subservient, passive and weak). Gay men are treated as women. Lesbians are hated and feared because they are economically and socially independent of men and the nuclear family.

The first class oppression of women by men forms the basis for the exploitation of the working class. Straight male domination in Western culture is not the result of any innate biological, physical or mental superiority. Sexism is perpetuated by private property, the family, and the isolation of women from social production.

Lessons of Gay Resistance

The persecution of lesbians and gays is an extension and intensification of the oppression of all women in a class society, and that is why gay liberation is integral to the struggle for socialist revolution. We are no longer speaking of sexual freedom alone, but how gays are oppressed economically, politically, socially--our human relations and culture are controlled by our economic relations in a capitalist society.

Gay resistance in modern times teaches us two very important lessons:

- 1) The growth of gay movements around the world always coincided with women's, workers and radical

movements. And when the gay movement was smashed, so too were the other movements. Moreover, they were smashed because the movements had been single-issue and reformist, even while the state apparatus was attacking them all and at-once.

2) The attacks always intensified under economic chaos and rightwing reaction

The modern lesbian and gay movement, dating from Stonewall, has not been without its problems. As in all social movements, there exist right and left wings, as well as liberals. As in all movements, there are problems with single-issuism, opportunism, cynicism, and separatism. The main problem has been reformist leadership.

Over and over, lesbians and gays--especially working-class lesbians and gays of color--have been sold out on one issue or another. The leadership of the gay movement has come primarily from single-issue civil rights activists (predominantly white men) who herd gays into the Democratic Party (even after the Democrats dumped the Gay Caucus). They advocate single-issuism, i.e., addressing only gay liberation--the result of which is candle-light vigils for AIDS victims rather than militant protest, and pleas for reforms, reforms, reforms under the illusion that capitalism will liberate gays.

Look at the movement around AIDS, a crisis which has gotten worldwide media attention. The AIDS crisis is significant in that the rightwing is using this tragedy to scapegoat gays and people of color. With AIDS attacking gays (50% of whom are gays of color), Haitians and Africans, funding from the government for research has been terribly inadequate--and rightwinger Jerry Falwell says that AIDS is just a case of "God weeding his garden."

It is not surprising that much of the proposed AIDS funding will come from American Indian Health Services. People with AIDS and those with AIDS-related conditions (ARC) who are holding a sleep-in in front of the old Federal Building have as one of their demands that there must be increased funding, but it is not to be taken from other social services. They will not play into any divide and conquer tactics. And yet, one of the spokespersons--after telling us they had been harassed and hosed down by federal security police--said that he would not be political but "personal" in his appeal to the public. This kind of non-confrontive response has bolstered the U.S. government to take a stronger stand against gays in general. Liberalism feeds the entire climate of reaction.

Meanwhile, the U.S. government is considering anti-gay legislation including quarantines and concentration camps; we are witnessing "straight slates" in elections; gay-bashing, police abuse, and job discrimination are increasing.

History has taught us that fascism is a capitalist response to economic and social crisis and will scapegoat and accelerate the oppression

against workers, women, people of color, gays, socialists. Are we going to cooperate by continuing to succumb to single-issue tactics and reform measures? Or are we going to beat them at their own sophisticated multi-issue fight?

We must have a revolutionary, multi-issue leadership; only that can unite us. And it is only with this kind of leadership that we will build a militant mass movement. Single-issue, reformist leaders stand in the way of militancy. They censor radical leadership, and this censorship will continue unless we work for an inclusive unity that points to the socialist solution to gay oppression.

Trotskyist Leadership: Pro-Lesbian/Gay or Not At All

The Trotskyists at this conference need to provide leadership for the lesbian and gay movement. Let us not be like the SWP, dropping gay liberation and, not coincidentally, Trotskyism, the Permanent Revolution, and selling-out the women's and people of color movements.

I joined CRSP (Committee for a Revolutionary Socialist Party) first and then the Freedom Socialist Party because they are the only organizations that have been fully committed to the lesbian and gay struggle as well as to women's, people of color, and workers' struggles. As an Asian-American lesbian campus worker, I feel that no facet of myself has been left out or made "secondary".

We must become a conscious revolutionary leadership, pro-feminist and pro-gay. The right to abortion and gay rights are the focus of rightwing attacks because they represent, on the most basic level, women's right to choose. If we are out to destroy capitalism, we must get at its social root, the nuclear monogamous family. If we can see the real interpenetration of sexual oppression with class exploitation, then we will be able to intervene in the gay movement and lead it to a revolutionary action.

Gay liberation cannot fully be won short of international socialism, and international socialism will not be won without the liberation of lesbians and gays. The final goal is to create a matriarchal socialist democracy and a truly human culture.

There will be no revolution without the leadership of women, people of color, lesbians and gays, especially lesbians of color. For lesbians of color are the most oppressed: by racism, sexism, heterosexism and class oppression. And when the reality of the conditions of their lives are understood in the context of the necessity for radical social change, they will fight for themselves, and in the process, fight for everybody.

The task for Trotskyists is clear: ally with the most oppressed, and in the process, rally the majority for socialist revolution.



